Kansas Department of Health and Environment

Kansas Health and Environmental Laboratories (KHEL)

Operations

- 69 KDHE Full-Time Employees.
- 200,000 samples/specimens analyzed annually with more than 1 million test results reported.
- Annual Budget of $8.6M with about $2M from state general funds. SGF funds reduced steadily since 2008.
- Serves all Kansans through the tests and services conducted: from those in rural communities to large metro areas; vulnerable populations to those at risk.

Functions

- Newborn Screening for more than 42,000 babies per year for 28 serious medical conditions such as PKU, sickle cell anemia, cystic fibrosis among others.
- Over 10,000 preschool children are tested for lead contamination in their blood.
- More than 10,000 tests for sexually transmitted infections are performed annually for contact investigations, especially with at-risk populations, through health departments and the KDHE programs.
- Provides support as part of the CDC's Laboratory Response Network.
- Tests for the spread of various infections and investigates possible foodborne illnesses or outbreaks of infections such as norovirus, salmonella, E. Coli, etc.
- Maintains readiness and performs testing of chemical and biological agents that could be used in terrorist attacks or other criminal activity.
- Ensures water Kansans drink meets federal safe drinking water standards through testing for coliform bacteria, pesticides, heavy metals, lead, copper, nitrates, radiochemical compounds and more.
- Tests recreational waters for the toxins associated with harmful algal blooms.

Concerns

- The laboratory operates in a 55-year-old building originally designed as a hospital, which in turn does not allow for good sample flow, hampering efficiency. Additionally, the building and equipment are in significant need of repair, improvement and updates. Existing issues include:
- Many floor tiles are made from asbestos. Wear exposes employees to the asbestos if the floors are not frequently sealed with wax.
- No emergency shower for Biological Select Agent laboratory.
- A 5-inch, capped-off pipe rusted and fell through the ceiling above employees work area.
- There is no fire suppression in the building — 49 fire extinguishers are spread throughout.
- Pipes in ceilings often leak, as well as air conditioning units in ceiling overflow their drain pans. This can happen above laboratory instrumentation causing damage and stopping work.
- Aging laboratory fixtures such as fume hoods and autoclaves are failing and some cannot be repaired.
- Doors don't seal completely, letting rain and bugs into the building.
- Air Handlers, supplemental air conditioning units and building infrastructure like hot water heaters are all aging and some will not be repairable over time.

Solution

The KHEL is at a point where significant SGF allocation will be needed to upgrade the existing facility, which would only band-aid current problems. Or, KHEL needs to invest in a long-term facility that will increase efficiencies and retention and recruitment of staff.

Failing Infrastructure Photos

(Clockwise from bottom to top) Light fixture that fell in lab area; inside of air handler; aging air handlers, hot water heaters; pipe that rusted and fell through ceiling.